1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

'From that time Ginoo *moong pandi* and Linthem *anyou* destroy all those who are too prosperous or have too many children. That is the reason why you should never remark on a person's prosperity; for if Ginoo *moong* hears you they will lose everything.'

Ginoo *moong* still claims victims today. One of the latest was the wife of Ongden, one of the richest members of the community, unique in having six healthy sons. She was always grumbling, saying how poor she was and how little ground they had been able to sow; to which the neighbours would reply 'How greedy you are; you are really very prosperous.' Ginoo *moong* heard this talk, and so she died, while still young. It is also perhaps the fear of Ginoo *moong* which makes Lepchas so reluctant to say what their property is; it was practically the only subject on which people were secretive and unwilling to talk; most of the information I obtained on the subject I got from neighbours. The majority of the households are all on nearly the same economic level; four or five are somewhat above, and three below the average.

iii

The chief crops raised by the Lepchas on the Talung side of Zongu are wet rice, dry rice, buckwheat, maize, cardamum, and different varieties of millet or eleusine. On the warmer Teesta side a certain amount of sugar cane and manioc is also raised. The wet rice is naturally exclusively cultivated on the terraced fields, which are capable of being flooded. Seven different types of wet rice are recognised—two of them being suitable for cultivation on the higher terraces, while the other five need the warmer climate of the valley. Some of the richer people grow these five varieties in rotation, as this is believed to rest the soil, the variety sown depending on individual choice; in these cases the seed is not saved, but is bought each year, generally from Gangtok. The majority however only grow one variety and save their own seed.

In Lingthem wet rice has been introduced for less than twenty years, and in other villages even more recently; some places, especially on the far side of the Talung, where the natural water is less plentiful, do not grow it yet. When the Mandal first learned about this crop he had experimental terraces made for three years; it was then gradually adopted by the other villagers, as they became convinced of the superior yield of this crop, and the amount of terraced ground is increased annually. Almost every household

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

order forbidding the destruction of trees. When all the debris has been collected the straight sticks are sorted out and the rest is put into heaps and set fire to, the ashes acting as a loosener and fertiliser of the soil. After burning, the ground is cleared of charred wood and the remaining weeds by hand and is then sown with the main crop. This is done in the simplest manner possible; holes are made in the ground with a pointed stick and the seed dropped into and round them.

The principal crops of these temporary fields are dry rice and millet. Twelve varieties of dry rice are named and recognised by small differences in their height, colour of seed and earlier or later ripening. Wild rice is found in the neighbourhood and most of their varieties come from seed selected from these wild plants. One of their most esteemed sorts, the 'black' rice, comes from a small amount of seed collected in the jungle by the elder brother of the Muktair, Tafoor's father; it was grown exclusively for seed for some years and now all the villagers have a good stock of it. The seed of all crops except wet rice is saved from year to year; it is the special business of the 'house-mother' at harvest time to select and put aside the grain which will be needed for the next year's seed. The sowing and harvesting of dry rice is surrounded with an elaborate ritual which will be described later.

A great number of different millets and eleusines are cultivated. Small fields of the earlier ripening varieties are made in the valley and a big field for the main crop is grown higher up. Only one field of dry rice and one of main-crop millet are made every year. Sometimes other grains or plants are grown among these crops, a certain amount of maize or different vegetables if the field-garden cannot take enough. In the autumn, after the rice or millet is gathered, the fields are sown with buckwheat which ripens in about five months; when that is harvested the ground is allowed to lie fallow for seven years. Two sowings of buckwheat are made annually; a big one in the autumn for food, and a smaller one in the spring for seed.

Lepcha agriculture is extremely inefficient by the standard of yield per acre. It is also absolutely inefficient. I was shocked at the carelessness of the sowing, with perhaps a third of the grain lying on the bare ground and the seed in the holes inadequately covered. When I remonstrated I was told 'It doesn't matter; if all the rice were to come up it would be too thick; so that if the birds eat some it will be just right.' To prevent the birds taking too

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

much a prayer is said (usually by an experienced layman) after each sowing. It is arguable that more intensive cultivation would not result in a bigger yield per hour of work; and the continuous change of ground, only possible with a light population, prevents erosion and soil exhaustion. The accompanying table shows schematically the work of the Lepcha agricultural year.

LEPCHA AGRICULTURAL CALENDAR
(for the Talung valley)

(*Note*: The Tibetan year begins in February, and the first of the Tibetan month falls on about the tenth of the English. Consequently 'February', e.g. should be interpreted as 'February 10th to March 10th.')

TANGBU (February).	Clear the ground and finish sowing buckwheat. This and the two preceding months are the period of intense cold when poor old people may die for lack of warmth.
NIBU (March)	Finish clearing ground and sow dry paddy in temporary fields; sow maize and early millet in valley. Weed cardamum in flower and strike new plants. This and the following month is the time of rain and hail-storms.
SUMGU (April)	Harvest barley and wheat. Clear ground for main-crop millet. Weed cardamum again round new-formed fruit.
ZIBU (May)	Harvest buckwheat. Sow maincrop millet. Sow maize in 'garden' burning the wheat straw for fertilising. This and the three following months are the period of constant rain and heat. Head-coverings are necessary.
NAPU (June)	Plant wet rice. Weed dry rice. This is the leanest month when people may go hungry. In this and the following month is the greatest infantile mortality, through diarrhoea and dysentery.
TIKPU (July)	Harvest earliest millets in valley. Weed maincrop millet.
DENGBU (August)	Harvest earliest variety of wet rice. Make a shed to dry cardamum fruit. Make a small sowing of buckwheat for seed.
GEBU (September)	Harvest dry rice. The women start harvesting the millet, the men the cardamum. This and the two following months are relatively dry.
GOOBU (October)	Cardamum picking continues. Wet rice is harvested. Barley, wheat and onions are sown in the 'garden'.
CHOOPU (November)	The seed-buckwheat is harvested. Cardamum is sold. This and the next two months are the prosperous period, the time of little work and much feasting, of shopping and trading expeditions. Most marriages are celebrated now.
CHUCHIKPU (December)	Taxes are paid. The harvested temporary fields must be made ready for buckwheat.
CHUNGPU (January).	The big sowing of buckwheat.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

would be a pity; but no one can wish to see them preserved as mere "museum specimens," which is what they are at present. After this short digression on possible improvements let us now return to the subject of agriculture.

Rice terraces are used every year; but it is usual to plant a different one of the six or seven varieties in use each year, as this is considered to be less exhausting to the ground. Dal, or pulse, which is the almost invariable accompaniment to cooked rice in the greater part of India, cannot here be grown on account of the coldness of the climate. The Mandal thinks that compared with "dry" cultivation the terraces give a slightly higher yield per acre: moreover, once made they are easier to work and less liable to damage by cattle. They can also be ploughed; whereas all other cultivation, except the few more level fields around the house, has to be laboriously prepared by hand. For this purpose a large hoe, with its blade turned at right angles to the handle, is the only tool in use, as is also the case in most parts of Nepal which I have visited. Not every man possesses a plough; but it is always possible to borrow a neighbour's, giving one's labour in payment when required.

Most of the crops in Lingtem are grown in fields which are used only once in every eight years, after which they are allowed to revert to forest. This system is very common in Assam, where it resulted in the complete deforestation of large areas before it could be controlled. In Lingtem, however, it is at least not harmful; for owing to the abundant rainfall the forest grows again in the course of four or five years. This is not to say, however, that more productive use could not be made of the land.

5th April:

We heard that Jiroong was sowing his dry rice this morning and accordingly went to investigate. This involved a steep climb for some five or six hundred feet above the monastery. In addition to Jiroong and his wife (plus the babies, who were left to play), there were present also

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

who was following behind, dropped the seed. Several grains were dropped into each hole and no attempt was made to cover them up with earth. I suggested that this was somewhat wasteful, and pointed to the crows waiting anxiously on the edge of the field. "But if the seeds are covered with earth," said Tempa, "they will come up much too thickly: as it is, the birds will eat half, and the result will be just about right." Apparently there will be some sort of ceremony in Jiroong's house this evening: this to ensure that the birds do not eat too much!

I noticed that amongst the seed for planting were three potatoes. These were also to be planted in the field for the purpose of providing seed for next year's crop. I suggested that so few a number would be lost sight of in so large a field. Jiroong agreed: he usually planted them in the field outside his house, but was trying them here to see what happened. There is no ceremony in connection with planting the first seed; nor does it matter whether men or women do the planting. To-day the actual planting was being done by women; but this was of no significance.

Once planted, these forest fields are left to fend for themselves, and are apparently not often weeded. The people realise the importance of manuring; but this is not possible in the case of the more distant fields. The forest itself is potentially valuable, but is not at present worked except to provide for such timber as is required for local construction. But in any case the cost of transportation would be prohibitive in the present circumstances.

Later same day:

Rain made it impossible for Jiroong to finish his rice-planting to-day; but even so, the ceremony in honour of *Mayel Rum*, which should rightly not be done until the planting is finished, was carried out this evening. We were told "*Kyet manin*"—"it doesn't really matter!"—an expression one hears more constantly than any other. The planting will be completed to-morrow.